

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims

Claims 1-21 (Cancelled).

Claim 22 (Currently Amended): A method for improving plant growth characteristics, comprising increasing, in a monocotyledonous plant, expression of an isolated a nucleic acid encoding an Na⁺H⁺/ exchanger (NHX) NHX protein according to SEQ ID NO. 2, wherein said plant is grown under non-salt stress conditions, wherein the increasing expression is effected by introducing and expressing in the plant said nucleic acid having the sequence according to SEQ ID NO. 1 in the sense orientation under the control of a promoter selected from the group consisting of a seed-specific promoter and a tissue-specific promoter, and wherein said growth characteristic is increased yield/biomass and/or modified plant architecture.

Claim 23 (Cancelled).

Claim 24 (Cancelled).

Claim 25 (Currently Amended): The method according to claim ~~22~~ 24, wherein said increased yield/biomass and/or modified plant architecture is selected from the group consisting of: increased aboveground area, increased number of first panicles, increased plant height, increased total number of seeds, increased number of filled seeds, increased total seed weight, increased harvest index and increased thousand kernel weight, each relative to corresponding wild type plants grown under non-salt stress conditions.

Claim 26 (Cancelled).

Claim 27 (Cancelled).

Claim 28 (Currently Amended): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of an endosperm-specific promoter ~~such as a prolamin promoter.~~

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Claim 29 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of a weak constitutive promoter ~~such as a maize ubiquitin promoter minus first intron.~~

Claim 30 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is from a monocotyledonous plant from the family Poaceae.

Claim 31 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is from a monocotyledonous plant from the family Poaceae and from the genus *Oryza*.

Claim 32 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is represented by SEQ ID NO: 1 ~~or a portion thereof~~ or a sequence capable of hybridizing therewith under stringent conditions.

Claim 33 (Currently Amended): Plants obtained ~~obtainable~~ by the method of claim 22, wherein said ~~which~~ plants have improved growth characteristics relative to corresponding wild type plants.

Claims 34-51 (Cancelled).

Claim 52 (New): The method according to claim 28 wherein said endosperm-specific promoter is a prolamin promoter.

Claim 53 (New): The method according to claim 29 wherein said weak constitutive promoter is a maize ubiquitin promoter minus first intron.